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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20505

9 April 1976
CIM 76-10104

MEMORANDUM FOR: Director, Division of International
Security Affairs, ERDA

SUBJECT : South Korea: Prospects for Political
Stability, Security Conditions, and
the Terrorist Threat

REFERENCE : Your letter dtd March 16, 1976
Re OCI Briefing Support to ERDA

Political Stability

1. President Pak has had substantial success in establishing a stable political system in South Korea over the past several years, despite periodic flare-ups of protest activity against his government.

2. The authoritarian Yushin Constitution, pushed through by Pak in 1972, has been followed by a series of emergency decrees giving extensive control power to government security forces. These actions have in large part undermined and innervated Pak's opponents. The communist takeover in Indochina last spring has also contributed to stability by reinforcing President Pak's arguments that the communist threat to his country requires tight discipline.

3. The arrest of opposition figures who issued an anti-government manifesto on March 1st has prompted a good deal of critical coverage in the western press, but in South Korea the incident has failed to spark widespread anti-government activity. The students, intellectuals, politicians, and Christian groups opposed to Pak are not only intimidated by fear of arrest and other reprisals, but they lack any highly-charged, emotional issue on which to galvanize broad-based opposition.

4. Those Koreans who oppose President Pak are among the best educated and most westernized individuals in the country, but they are relatively few in number,

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not well organized, and their calls for basic democratic reforms and human rights do not have broad appeal in South Korea today. The military, business, and bureaucratic establishments, and most of the rural population, support Pak's basic economic and defense policies and accept the need for a strong central government.

5. There are, of course, some inherent instabilities in President Pak's position. Despite extensive security precautions, Pak could be assassinated. A Korean from Japan killed Pak's wife and came close to shooting Pak himself in the summer of 1974. Pak could face more substantial domestic opposition at some point if he should overreact or impose excessive punishment on his critics. He has, however, shown a talent for stopping short of such measures. In a worst case scenario, if Pak ordered his security forces to take severe measures against demonstrators, an action-reaction cycle could escalate and the military--the final arbiters of power in the country--might very well force Pak to step aside. The generals would almost certainly take such action if it appeared that the North Koreans were successfully exploiting a period of instability in the South.

Internal Security

6. South Korea's internal security forces are highly effective. The national police, military security agencies, and the Korean intelligence service have developed extensive informant networks and quick reaction capabilities that provide good protection for sensitive government facilities in both urban and most rural areas.

7. The local population cooperates fully with the government security organs. In the late 1960s when North Korea sent numerous commando units into the South they were almost invariably reported to authorities; in the past several years infiltration from the North has been sharply curtailed but local inhabitants continue to report the presence of suspicious strangers or the occasional small North Korean agent teams that are still sent into the South on political subversion missions or to gather intelligence.

8. While successful penetrations by North Korean infiltrators appear to have been infrequent in recent years, they have occurred. In the summer of 1975, for example, armed North Korean intelligence personnel

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landed undetected on the South Korean coast in a rural area and took photographs of a military airbase before finally being tracked down.

9. The Blue House raid in 1968, in which a 31-man North Korean commando-assassination team penetrated almost into the center of Seoul, shows that Pyongyang does have a capability for such missions. In recent years, Pyongyang has concentrated on competition with Seoul in terms of propaganda and diplomatic maneuvers, but a return to more aggressive tactics in future years cannot be ruled out. If the North Koreans again initiate strong probes into the South, they would probably find it difficult to penetrate South Korean security forces or attack sensitive installations.

Terrorism

10.

Government security checks at South Korean airports and ports of entry are probably among the most rigorous in the world.

11. The terrorist threat from groups now inside South Korea is probably not significant. The ownership of firearms by private Korean citizens has been prohibited for years. Virtually all of the activity by dissident groups within the country in recent years has been oriented toward the political arena.

Office of Current Intelligence